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Wahrheit und Dichtung.

A STUDY OF

George Eliot's Love-Life..

Wahrheit UND Dichtung:

A PSYCHOLOGICAL STUDY,

SUGGESTED BY CERTAIN CHAPTERS IN THE LIFE OF

GEORGE ELIOT.

BY

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IN his preface to the *autobiography* of George Eliot, Mr. Cross makes the following remarks:

"The life has been allowed to write itself in extracts from her letters and journals. Free from the obtrusion of any mind but her own, this method serves, I think, better than any other open to me, to show the development of her intellect and character.

"In dealing with the correspondence I have been influenced by the desire to make known the woman, as well as the author, through the presentation of her daily life.

"On

"On the intellectual side there remains little to be learned by those who already know George Eliot's books. In the twenty volumes which she wrote and published in her life-time will be found her best and ripest thoughts. The letters now published throw light on another side of her nature—not less important, but hitherto unknown to the public—the side of the affections."

With this whet to the intellectual curiosity and stimulus to the gentler sympathies, one seizes the book with avidity, reading on and on, in eager expectation of a feast for mind and soul. At last one lays it down, with a sigh of physical exhaustion, and a sensation of—what? Is it not disappointment? Have we had much "light" on "the side of the affections?" Do we "know the woman" decidedly better?

Is

Is "the development of her intellect and character" shown to us truly? Is not the whole thing a little like the play of Hamlet, with Hamlet left out? And may it not be just possible that the *non*-"obtrusion of any mind but her own" gives the writer the privilege of completely veiling her inner self?

Considering what George Eliot was, and finally became, there are phases of soul-life through which she *must* have passed—and to which there is not a reference in either the letters or journal. To those interested in the subject, it only remains to conjecture what is probable, and then, by reading between the lines, to see if some evidence in the case is not to be found. This effort at conjecture and blank reading will be made in good faith, and the student of psychology may judge whether the result savors more of poetry or of truth.

PROPOSITION

PROPOSITION I. It is impossible that George Eliot grew to the age of twenty-one without having some sort of a love-affair—probably, a very desperate one.

In childhood she is thus described: "In her moral development she showed, from the earliest years, the trait that was most marked in her all through life, namely, the absolute need of some one person who should be all in all to her, and to whom she should be all in all." Now characters of this type make romantic experiences for themselves. They cannot escape it. If they dwell in the most isolated of neighborhoods, the one man, or woman, who crosses their path is—or is imagined to be—their affinity. Ecstacy or catastrophe must follow. And where the ecstacy is not recorded, is not the catastrophe implied?

Where

Where should it be looked for? Between the ages of fifteen and twenty. Let us examine the circumstances clustering about those years.

The term ending Christmas 1835 was the last spent at Miss Franklin's school. George Eliot was then sweet sixteen. In the summer of 1836 her mother died. In the following spring her sister Chrissey was married to Mr. Edward Clarke, of Meriden. George Eliot was then eighteen. During the three years afterwards, which were spent at Griff, she is depicted as ultra religious, regarding pleasure a snare, novels useless, dress a vanity and society danger.

Now what if Edward Clarke were the original of "Stephen Guest"? And sister Chrissey were the original of "Cousin Lucy"? And the generally acknowledged autobiographical portraiture of Maggie, in the

the early chapters of the "Mill on the Floss", were a mere nothing beside the thrilling fragments of soul autobiography in some of the later scenes ?

Who that ever loved and renounced love—can read with dry eyes, that heart-rending chapter called "Waking" ? There is something soul-haunting in poor Maggie's despairing cry: "Oh, *some* good will come by clinging to the right. Dear, dear Stephen, let me go!—don't drag me into deeper remorse. My whole soul never has consented—it does not consent now." And there is something terrible in the suppressed rage of Stephen: "Go then—leave me—don't torture me any longer—I can't bear it"—and when she stretches out her hand toward him, and he shrinks from it, with the one fierce exclamation: "Leave me !" Such scenes are not evolved from a brilliant imagination

nation—every word is written with heart's blood.

But in ordinary existence the tragedy of life may be enacted, without dramatic surroundings. That agonizing interview may have taken place some bright summer day, beneath one of the great shade trees on the lawn at Griff—while sister Chrissey went indoors to bake a cake for tea. In novels, the situation must be accentuated—but in reality, the heart may hear its death-knell at any spot or hour.

Now what evidence is there to make this hypothesis probable? No direct written evidence certainly. But silence sometimes is very eloquent. Reader, is there at present extant any direct written evidence of your first love affair—supposing it to be an unhappy one? You may have had a journal into which you poured the fluctuating torrent of your emotions. But did not that journal

journal finally feed the flames? You may have had some dear and trusted friend, to whom you confided all your woes. But did you not, a year or two later coax that friend to return you certain letters, and did those letters not follow the fate of the journal? Then why suppose that George Eliot, with her broad human sympathies, was different in this matter from the rest of the human family? Mr. Cross deplores not being able to obtain any letters between the dates of Jan. 1836 and Aug. 1838. We deplore it also. And it is ominous. What stacks of valueless letters insipid young people keep. Probably the most interesting letters ever written are the ones most carefully destroyed.

George Eliot did not look back upon youth as a happy period. In regard to these years in particular it is said: Many references will be found in the subsequent

subsequent correspondence to what she suffered at this time, all summed up in the popular phrase, "We can have but one mother." It may also be remark- with equal truth, that *we can have but one first love.* And many persons, suffering intensely, will lay great stress on a secondary grief to shield from observation the one which stands with them first and deepest. Her father, not her mother, was the parent with whom she had the closest tie—so it is hardly natural to suppose that the death of the latter was quite the life-crushing experience it is represented. The words —"To the old, sorrow is sorrow; to the young it is despair," sounds like the cry of a love-wounded heart.

In the years which immediately followed her removal from Griff to Foleshill, she was much absorbed in intellectual work and went considerably into society; yet

yet her letters show a continued under-current of sadness. For example: "I have of late felt a depression that has disordered the vision of my mind's eye and made me *alive* to what is certainly a fact (though my imagination when I am in health is an adept at concealing it) that I am *alone* in the world. I do not mean to be so sinful as to say that I have not friends *most* undeservedly kind and tender, and disposed to form a far too favorable estimate of me, but I mean I have no one who enters into my pleasures and griefs, no one with whom I can pour out my soul, no one with the same yearnings, the same temptations, the same delights as myself." And then: "Is not this a true autumn day? Just the still melancholy I love —that makes life and nature harmonize." And so on.

At

At the time of the difficulty with her father in regard to religious matters, she writes: "There is but *one* woe, that of leaving dear father—all else, doleful lodgings, scanty meals and *gazing-stockism*, are quite indifferent to me." Now it is very unnatural for "*gazing-stockism*" to be a matter of indifference to a girl of twenty-three. Unless in the case of an exceedingly stolid character, the fact alone is an indication of heart-break. There are peculiar mental phases which belong with peculiar emotional experiences. In all of Henry James' writing there is not, perhaps, one more exquisite touch, than where he describes Isabel Archer, just after she has discovered her husband's true character. She is in a railway station—under somewhat awkward circumstances —but she suffers from no embarrassment—she feels

feels that she will never feel embarrassed again as long as she lives. And George Eliot, like Isabel Archer, had attained that peculiar calm which comes with the acceptance of great sorrow.

But before the intellectual emancipation, which Coventry influences made possible, was reached, her mind was, to a degree, in a rigid and narrow state. Of marriage she says: "For my part, when I hear of the marrying and giving in marriage that is being constantly transacted, I can only sigh for those who are multiplying earthly ties, which, though powerful enough to detach their hearts and thoughts from heaven, are so brittle as to be liable to be snapped asunder at every breeze." In regard to novels, she remarks: "The Scriptural declaration, 'As face answereth face in a glass, so the heart of man to man,'

man,' will exhonorate me from the charge of uncharitableness, or too high an estimation of myself, if I venture to believe that the same causes which exist in my own breast to render novels and romances pernicious have their counterpart in that of every fellow creature. . . . Domestic fictions, as they come more within the range of imitation, seem more dangerous. For my part, I am ready to sit down and weep at the impossibility of my understanding or barely knowing a fraction of the sum of objects that present themselves for our contemplation in books and in life. Have I, then, any time to spend on things that never existed?" Pleasure also seemed to her great waste of time. Far from complaining of the loneliness of Griff, she found company an interruption of fixed pursuits. She speaks of "Michaelmas with its onorous duties

duties and anxieties, much company (for us) and little reading"—and another time writes to a confidential friend: "Remember Michaelmas is coming and I shall be engaged in matters so nauseating to me, that it will be a charity to console me." Why is she so bitter against Michaelmas? Perhaps she first met Edward Clarke at some merry home festival on that occasion, and the associations lingering in her mind make it intolerable. Even music which she loved before, and later in life loved again intensely, seemed to her then a trivial accomplishment, on which it was not worth while to spend much practice. Her condition of mind is well described in George Eliot's own words, descriptive of Maggie: "From what you know of her, you will not be surprised that she threw some exaggeration and wilfulness, some pride and impetuosity

petuosity, even into her self-renunciation: her own life was still a drama to her, in which she demanded of herself that her part should be played with intensity. And so it came to pass that she often lost the spirit of humility by being excessive in the outward act; she often strove after too high a flight, and came down with her poor little half-fledged wings dabbled in the mud. . . That is the path we all like when we set out on our abandonment of egoism—the path of martyrdom and endurance, where the palm branches grow, rather than the steep highway of tolerance, just allowance and self-blame, where there are no leafy honors to be gathered and worn." But no one can judge her harshness harshly, on coming to words like these: "What an exquisite little thing that is of Harriet Martineau's 'The Crofton Boys.'

Boys.' There are two or three lines in it that would feed one's soul for a month. Hugh's mother says to him, speaking of people who have permanent sorrow, 'They soon had a new and delicious pleasure which none but the bitterly disappointed can feel—the pleasure of rousing their souls to bear pain, and of *agreeing with God silently*, when nobody knows what is in their hearts.'" Ah, do not such words reveal heart history?

And now let us consider under what circumstances the "Mill on the Floss" was written.

In January, '59, we hear of George Eliot going to a certain library to read about *inundations*. She was then contemplating a new novel. Probably an inundation was to figure in it somewhere. InFebruary, '59, she writes: "I have just had a letter from sister Chrissey —ill in bed, consumptive—regretting that she ever ceased

ceased to write to me. It has ploughed up my heart." Be it observed, not through her heart—but it has ploughed it up—referring to it as a thing that has been long buried—as a skull might be ploughed up on an old battle field. On March 15th Chrissey died—and George Eliot thus alludes to her: "I had a very special feeling towards her—stronger than any third person would think likely." Now what is the usual foundation of such "very special feelings?" It is deep intellectual sympathy, or it is habitual companionship, or it is the making of some great, great sacrifice. The intellectual sympathy did not exist between the sisters —they were totally different. The habitual companionship did not exist. In childhood Chrissey was a favorite with her aunts and visited them frequently, while Mary Ann remained at home and played with her brother.

Almost

Almost as soon as they were grown up, the elder sister married, after which occurrence the intercourse seems to have been exceedingly slight. Only one direct mention is made of George Eliot visiting her sister until the death of Mr. Edward Clarke—about fifteen years after the marriage—when she hastens to her at once—and perhaps is somewhat disappointed that Chrissey does not depend upon her sympathy quite so much as she had expected. Evidently, on the part of the elder sister, the tie had loosened, while on the part of the younger it had grown more intense. What kept it so alive in her mind? Was it not that the true source of that "special feeling" was in a great, great sacrific—and one which, through all those years, remained unrelentingly the same?

On April 29th George Eliot writes: "Resumed my new

new novel, of which I am going to rewrite the two first chapters." Some little time later she says: "At present my mind works with the most freedom and the keenest sense of poetry in my remotest past." In September she writes: "In much anxiety and doubt about my new novel"—but a few weeks later she declares: "Certain new ideas have occurred to me in relation to my new novel and I am in better hope of it." Afterwards she admits that the latter part of the story is written under a peculiar stress of emotion. And when it is completed she says: "I am grateful yet rather sad to have finished—sad that I shall live with my people on the banks of the Floss no longer." But she seems extremely sensitive in regard to this work—takes pains to mention that there will be no portraits in it—says: "I don't mean to read any reviews of my next book,"

book," and "I don't mean to send 'The Mill on the Floss' to any one except Dickens, who has behaved with a delicate kindness in a recent matter, which I wish to acknowledge." Dickens, be it noted, was a new friend and could not possibly have an inkling of her past.

Now had she reason to believe that she could give expression to her deepest soul experiences, in this book, and not suffer annoyance from personal recognition? She had the best of reasons for so believing. "Adam Bede" had been recognized as hers by only two human beings—a lady friend in Algiers and her own brother. When she told her most intimate friends, the Brays and Miss Hennell, that she was the author, they were amazed. This made an impression upon her. In her journal she says: "This experience has enlightened me

a

a good deal as to the ignorance in which we all live of each other." Moreover, Mrs. Gaskell wrote to her: "I never was such a goose as to believe that books like yours were a mosaic of real and ideal." Now that such a bright woman as Mrs. Gaskell should be "such a goose" as *not* to *know* that all first class novels *are* precisely that, a mosaic of real and ideal, is remarkable. A patchwork, it might be, in the hands of a blunderer, but a mosaic in the hands of an artist. George Eliot surely knew from which quarry each of her finely graded little marble cubes was taken—and in the face of so much amiable obtuseness, she had no cause to shrink from placing them effectively together.

In the early chapters of the "Mill on the Floss," the descriptions of "Lucy" are very descriptive of Chrissey —they had the same neatness and sweetness and grace and

and simplicity—they both were favorites with the aunts, and glided along peacefully and prosperously in life. There is a contrast drawn between Lucy and Maggie which perhaps would hold quite as well between Chrissey and Mary Ann—the one like a soft white kitten, the other like a clumsy, powerful young dog—the beauty being with the kitten and the "points" with the dog. And this contrast, in some degree, continued after the childish years. Lucy is always the pink of pefection, to everybody; Maggie, at her very best, is beautiful only to her lovers—and it is only at rare moments that a consciousness of her own charms looms upon herself. There is one phrase concerning her: "Life was certainly very pleasant just now: it was becoming very pleasant to dress in the evenings and to feel that she was one of the beautiful things of this spring-time."

spring-time." Perhaps George Eliot had peculiar associations with that season of the year. Somewhere in middle age we find her writing: "I have lost my *young* dislike of spring." Oh, what volumes are told in one such sentence! What does it mean, when to the young the flowers have lost their sweetness, and the music has gone out from the song of the birds, and the soft violet mist on the landscape seems only the mist of tears? There are experiences for which there are no words. "The heart knoweth its own bitterness."

Whether the love-affair with Philip also is autobiographic, there seems to be no outward evidence. But when one reads of that growing tenderness, which has in it so much of gratitude, so much of pity, and which would have stood for love, had not a stronger emotion intervened, the delineation of the fine gradations of

feeling

feeling is too life-like not to be true. Yes, Philip surely lived—and died, probably, long before the first line of his story was written. Some time ago, there was a hint, in one of the newspapers, of an early romance of George Eliot—one, in which she renounced her lover, out of respect to her father's wishes. It was said that her parting letter to him was very beautiful and touching. Perhaps he was Philip—and where is that letter now? Surely it would be touching still.

As the story nears its close all outward autobiography vanishes, but the soul autobiography penetrates intensely to the very end. In the last scenes forget "Tom" and think of Chrissey,—Chrissey, who turned against her sister the moment she had done, though from the deepest conviction of right, what the world called wrong—Chrissey, who, after years of silence, from

from her death-bed wrote to say that she regretted she ever had ceased writing. Then read these words, where Maggie has attempted to rescue Tom from the flood, and the shadow of death is resting upon them both :

"It was not till Tom had pushed off and they were on the wide water—he face to face with Maggie—that the full meaning of what had happened rushed upon his mind. It came with so overpowering a force—such an entirely new revelaton to his spirit of the depths in life that had lain beyond his vision, which he had fancied so keen and clear, that he was unable to ask a question. They sat mutely gazing at each other : Maggie with eyes of intense life looking out from a weary, beaten face—Tom pale with a certain awe and humiliation. Thought was busy though the lips were silent ;

silent; and though he could ask no question, he guessed a story of almost miraculous divinely-protected effort. But at last a mist gathered over the blue-gray eyes, and the lips found a word they could utter: Maggie!

"Maggie could make no answer but a long deep sob of that mysterious, wondrous happiness that is one with pain."

Thus the sister spirits blended at last and

"*In their death they were not divided.*"

PROPOSITION II. That a person of George Eliot's temperament could not have reached middle age—without experiencing a grand passion—something far more powerful in calibre than a first love, something which stirred the very deepest depths of her nature, calling

calling forth the most keen and intense emotions of the heart and the most sympathetic intellectual devotion. That Geo. H. Lewes was *not* the object of this passion —that her union with him was possible only after this passion had exhausted itself and George Eliot was finally and utterly heart-broken.

Now where shall we look for the evidence of all this? In the necessity of things. With her disposition, the grand passion was inevitable. From the time of her self-renunciation, in the love of her youth, she was unconsciously preparing for the second and greater catastrophe. She was repressing steadily, for years, all amatory sentiment—perhaps she even believed that she never could love again. But hers was a loving nature —and repression meant only that, when the pressure was removed, emotion would rush forth with redoubled

doubled power. Meanwhile she was cultivating her intellect in a manner which brought her into close comprehension of men whose lives ordinarily are little undesrtood by women. Granting then that the grand passion did exist, who was its object? Unhesitatingly surmise is ventured—Herbert Spencer.

And where is the evidence for this? Not in plain writing certainly. If the outward traces of an unhappy first love are done away with, those of a second will be despatched more quickly and more surely. But it is not possible altogether to conceal a genuine passion. However carefully the fire may be buried, a small film of smoke will escape somewhere and take a denser form as it rises into clear day-light. And so words escape sometimes, which the speaker utters recklessly, supposing them to be quite unintelligible—and perhaps they

they are so at the moment, but in the light of accumulated facts their real meaning becomes evident.

Let us consider now the circumstances of the acquaintance between Miss Evans and the great philosopher.

In the summer of 1851 George Eliot moved from Coventry to London, to take part in the editing of the *Westminster Review*. She boarded with the family of Mr. Chapman, the editor, in the Strand. Weekly receptions were the custom of the family and some of the most distinguished literary men of the day visited freely at the house. In September she became acquainted with Herbert Spencer. His book on Social Statics was just published and had met with much praise from G. H. Lewes in the *Leader*—Mr. Lewes having already won reputation as a critic. Apparently the

the acquaintance ripened rapidly. In November she mentions going to the theatre with Herbert Spencer, and after that his name recurs frequently in her letters to the Brays and Miss Hennell. Once he brings Mr. Lewes to introduce him to her—another time he takes her to the opera—again she quotes an anecdote which he has told her—and so on. Some of these little paragraphs from her letters are very suggestive : For example : April, 1852. "I went to the opera on Saturday—I Martiri, at Covent Garden—with 'my excellent friend Herbert Spencer,' as Lewes calls him. We have agreed that we are not in love with each other, and that there is no reason why we should not have as much of each other's society as we like. He is a good delightful creature, and I always feel better for being with him."

May,

May, 1852. "My brightest spot, next to my love for my *old* friends, is the deliciously calm *new* friendship that Herbert Spencer gives me. We see each other every day and have a delightful *camaraderie* in everything. But for him my life would be desolate enough."

Now in such words as these there is both deception and self-deception. The most pure and ideal friendships between men and women are possible—but where they exist the question of being in love would no more arise than it would between brother and sister. The mere fact that love is mentioned, and that positions in regard to it have to be defined, means that some one is going to have trouble. To Herbert Spencer perhaps the friendship was "deliciously calm," but to George Eliot's impassioned nature that was impossible. To her he was a new revelation of life—he

was

was grand in intellect—grand in power—and the worshipful spirit in her, on intimacy, had to turn into love.

That they were on terms of intimacy which rarely exist except in a case of marriage engagement, can hardly be doubted. There are very frequent mentions of going to the opera—and circumstances imply that he was her escort. Her allusions to him imply that he is a privileged character. It is impossible for a young woman to put herself in such relations with a young man and not injure herself—unless she be of so hard or so light a nature as to be beyond the reach of injury.

In May, 1852, George Eliot writes: "The meeting last night went off triumphantly and I saluted Mr. Chapman with 'See the Conquering Hero Comes' on the piano at 12 o'clock; for not until then was the last

last magnate, except Herbert Spencer, out of the house."

In June she writes: "I have assured Herbert Spencer that you will think it a sufficiently formal answer to the invitation you sent him through Mr. Lewes, if I tell you that he will prefer waiting for the pleasure of a visit to you until I am with you—if you will have him then. . . . Yesterday Herbert Spencer brought his father to see me—a large-brained, highly informed man, with a certain quaintness and simplicity, altogether very pleasing."

These are the last happy and familiar allusions to Herbert Spencer—and apparently his proposed visit to the Brays did not take place. Before the month was out, the spirit of her dream had changed. Only a few days later, she writes:

"The

"The opera, Chiswick Flower Show, the French play and the Lyceum, all in one week, brought their natural consequences of headache and hysterics—all yesterday. At five o'clock I felt quite sure that life was unendurable. This morning, however, the weather and I are both better, having cried ourselves out and used up all our clouds; and I can even contemplate living six months longer. Was there ever anything more dreary than this June?"

In July, she writes: "I am busy packing. I go to Broadstairs on Saturday. I am sadly in want of the change, and would much rather present myself to you all when I can do you more credit as a friend."

In regard to the very simple and sequestered cottage, where she stays at Broadstairs, and is the only boarder, she says: "I am thinking whether it would

not

not be wise to retire from the world and live here for the rest of my days. With some fresh paper on the walls and an easy chair, I think I could resign myself."

Soon after her arrival here she writes to Mr. Bray: "Do not be anxious about me—there is no cause. I am profiting in body, in mind, from quiet walks and talks with nature. . . . If you insist on my writing about "emotions," why I must get up some expressly for the purpose. But I must own I would rather not, for it is the grand wish and object of my life to get rid of them as far as possible, seeing they have already had more than their share of my nervous energy."

Early in August Mrs. Bray paid her a short visit, and immediately after George Eliot writes: "Are you

you really better for having been here? Since you left I have been continually regretting that I could not make your visit pleasanter. I was irritable and out of sorts; but you have an apparatus for secreting happiness—that's it. Providence, seeing that I wanted weaning from this place, has sent a swarm of harvest-bugs and lady-birds. These, with the half-blank, half-dissipated feeling which comes on after having companions and losing them, make me think of returning to London on Saturday week with more resignation than I have felt before. I am very well and 'plucky'—a word which I propose to substitute for happy, as more truthful."

But as soon as she reaches London she writes to Miss Hennell: "I celebrated my return to London by the usual observance—that is to say, a violent headache

headache, which is not yet gone, and of course I am in the worst of spirits and my opinion of things is not worth a straw. . . . Somehow my letters—except those which come under the inexorable imperative *must* (the "ought" I manage well enough to shirk)—will not get written. The fact is I am in a croaking mood, and I am waiting and waiting for it to pass by, so if my pen croaks in spite of my resolutions to the contrary, please to take no notice of it. Ever since I came back I have felt something like the madness which imagines that the four walls are contracting and going to crush one. . . . There is a great dreary article on the Colonies by my side, asking for reading and abridgement, so I cannot go on scribbling—indeed my hands are so hot and tremulous this morning that it will be better for you if I leave off. Your little

little loving notes are very precious to me: but I say nothing about matters of feeling till my good genius has returned from his excursions; the evil one has possession just now."

During the autumn and winter following she appears to be in a very restless state. In October she pays a visit to Edinburgh, then one to Rosehill, and again in December she is at the Brays. About this time the death of Edward Clarke taking place, she goes at once to her sister Chrissey. In February she visits her again, and goes also to the Brays. In May she makes another little stay at Rosehill and in June she goes to the seashore. And during all these months the name of Herbert Spencer is mentioned just three times—once to say that he called and spent the evening—once to say that she is likely to meet him

him at a certain dinner—and once to say that Mr. Lewes has told her that one of his books is greatly admired. Do not these circumstances tell their own story? Surely *something more* than "the opera, Chiswick Flower Show, the French play and the Lyceum, all in one week, brought their *natural* consequences of headache and hysterics."

What happened? Probably nothing, as far as solid facts are concerned—just some little incident, some turn of the conversation which opened her eyes to the truth, that she was not to Herbert Spencer what he was to her. Not that he did not love her—probably he loved her more than he ever did any other human being—but his way of doing it was so "deliciously calm!" She had spoilt him. Men are selfish, even when they love. During the winter, the intercourse

of

of the two had been delightful—he had had as much of her society as he wanted—every day, when she was at leisure and in her best and brightest mood. Indeed he had most of the pleasures of matrimony, without any of its responsibilities. If he had married her, he would also have had her companionship when she was not at her best and brightest—when she was too busy to attend to him—when she was all tired out from her work—yes, even when she had her bad headaches and occasional hysterical attacks. Just imagine the great philosopher tolerating such proceedings! And yet he would have married her, if she had been a more commonplace woman. For if she had been, she would have known how to manage him—and would have felt no shame in doing it. She would have played fast and loose with him—would have

have disappointed him occasionally—would have flirted with some other man—and then, when he saw that there was danger of *losing* her, his affection would have ceased to be so "deliciously calm," and he would have been only too glad to get her, headaches, hysterics and all. But we may be grateful that he did not. If he had married her, there would have been no George Eliot—Mr. Herbert Spencer would have had an excellent private secretary, and the world would have had one more Jennie Welch Carlyle to sympathize with and lament over.

But however serenely we may view it now—and however patiently she may have accepted it in the end—at the time, it was a terrible ordeal for her. Her faith in her hero had been perfect—that was the whole extent of her calmness—and when the faith was swept away

away at one stroke, the calmness went too. It was impossible for one of her impassioned heart to love placidly—her life was in her emotions—and her disappointment was her death-blow. Yet she could not die. The question, after this crushing defeat, was how to go on living. The impulse of her wounded nature was to bury herself alive in that lonely cottage by the sea. But something in her rose superior to that and forbade it. Where there is intense love, there is apt to be intense pride also. And sometimes, where a very deep and pure affection has been disregarded, something savoring of scorn will step in and fill the empty place of love. She knew what her devotion was worth—and she scorned his want of appreciation. She scorned to let him or any one know what he had been able to make her suffer. She scorned to let any

any one think that he could turn her away from her chosen path. Therefore she returned to London—to the very house where first they met—where they had met so often that it seemed almost as if they had lived together. She returned to face the old world, old work, the old acquaintances—everything except the old happiness. In its place was only the new pain. She was right in calling herself "plucky." Bravely and determinedly she fought her battle; but she subjected herself to a fearful strain. And she never again was the same woman she had been before.

In the "Mill on the Floss" are these words: "Nature repairs her ravages, but not all. The uptorn trees are not rooted again; the parted hills are left scarred; if there is a new growth, the trees are not the same as the old, and the hills underneath their green vesture bear

bear the marks of the past rending. To the eyes that have dwelt on the past there is no thorough repair." And these words are most expressive of her own condition. However rich and full her life may afterwards have become, she always was conscious of her own loss. Though she may never have uttered one word in allusion to it, the undercurrent of her life tells its own tale. The enthusiasm had died out of her. She did not care much to know people. She did not care to own things. She did not want any pet which would require special attention. The satisfaction of having a home precisely to her liking, would not repay her for the trouble of building it. She was not willing to take trouble for anything except her literary work, and such things as appeared strictly matters of duty. She accepted resignedly both good and evil. But her comments

comments on life, as she went along, were such as these :

"What hard work it seems to go on living sometimes ! Blessed are the dead." May, 1869.

"The formula which would fit the largest number of lives is 'a doing without, more or less patiently.'" June, 1870.

"I don't find that the young troubles seem lighter on looking back." November, 1871.

When she alludes to the brighter side of life, she says : "Human happiness is a web with many threads of pain in it."

And when the world is ringing with her applause, she writes : "But few authors, I suppose, who have had a real success, have known less of the flush and sensation of triumph." . . . "I often think of my

my dreams when I was four or five and twenty. I thought then how happy fame would make me!"

And through this cruel ordeal—this struggling back to life—this picking up of the burdens, which she no longer felt the strength to bear—who was it that made the unendurable endurable to her? Unquestionably, George H. Lewes. George Eliot was of a most unfortunately exclusive disposition. The first winter she was in London, there were dozens of intellectual men visiting at the Chapmans—and doubtless she was very polite to them all and conversed with them charmingly—but to her feelings, there was *only Herbert Spencer*. The second winter there was the same intellectual set, with the exception of Herbert Spencer—and probably she made more of an effort than ever to converse with them in a bright and interesting manner—but to her feelings

feelings, there was *only George H. Lewes.* Not that she was concious of it from the outset. Probably she would have scouted the idea that that man was to be her consolation. It came about very gradually. In September, '51, she writes: "I was introduced to Lewes the other day in Jeff's shop—a sort of miniature Mirabeau in appearance." During the winter following she alludes to him occasionally, yet never with any special interest. But during the second winter she mentions him rather frequently and in a decidedly interested tone —yet never with the enthusiasm, far less the forced restraint, of her allusions to Herbert Spencer the previous winter. She did not have to explain that she was not in love with him, or call him her "excellent friend" in quotation marks. She speaks of him in this fashion:

November, '52. "And when I sat down again, thinking

thinking I had two clear hours before dinner, rap at the door—Mr. Lewes—who of course sits talking till the second bell rings."

March, '53. "We had a pleasant evening last Wednesday. Lewes, as always, genial and amusing. He has quite won my liking, in spite of myself."

April, '53. "People are very good to me. Mr. Lewes, especially, is kind and attentive, and has quite won my regard, after having had a good deal of my vituperation. Like a few other people in the world, he is much better than he seems. A man of heart and conscience, wearing a mask of flippancy."

After that there are numerous slight allusions, and by autumn we find her saying, in regard to him:

"I have promised to do some work to-night and to-morrow for a person who is rather more idle than

than myself, so I have not a moment to spare."

In April, '54, she writes: "Poor Lewes is ill, and is ordered not to put pen to paper for a month; so I have something to do for him in addition to my own work, which is rather pressing. He has gone to Arthur Helps, in Hampshire, for ten days and I really hope this total cessation from work, in obedience to a peremptory order, will end in making him better than he has been for the last year. No opera and no fun for me for the next month."

May, '54. Mr. Lewes is going on a walking excursion to Windsor to-day with his doctor, who pronounces him better, but not yet fit for work." . . .

—'54. "I expect to see Mr. Lewes back again to-day. His poor head—his only fortune—is not well yet; and he has had the misery of being *ennuye* with idleness,

ness, without perceiving the compensating physical improvement. Still, I hope the good he has been getting has been greater than he has been concious of."

These little floating fragments show the turning of the current. At first, evidently, she was not drawn to him—afterwards she began to like him in spite of herself—and finally his troubles awakened her sympathy.

It was pity, not passion, which brought these two together—and it was gratitude which held them faithful. Love is fiery, imperious, exacting—ready to raise a disturbance over a dust-fleck on its ideal. But pity is gentle, patient, tender—and gratitude is intensely loyal. There may have been more of admiration on the man's side than on the woman's—for the one was a great genius and the other a great recognizer of genius—but the motives which actuated these two were identical.

George

George H. Lewes saw plainly what the relations between Miss Evans and Herbert Spencer had been—and what their cessation must mean for her. He probably was disgusted with his "excellent friend" for his want of appreciation of a magnificent woman. And when he saw that magnificent woman facing the world so bravely alone, it was an impulse of the purest kindness which brought him to her side, and prompted the considerate attentions which took off the edge from what she suffered. There was no self-seeking—it was giving, on both sides. Years later George Eliot wrote: "Life, as you say, is a big thing. No wonder there comes a season when we cease to look around and say 'how shall I enjoy?' but, as in a country which has been visited by the sword, pestilence and famine, think only how we shall help the wounded, and how find seed

seed for the next harvest—how till the earth and make a little time of gladness for those who are being born without their own asking." It is in the spirit of these words that she acted in uniting herself to George H. Lewes. His household was broken, his wife had deserted him, his children had neither a mother nor a home, his life was utterly desolate—and she was the one human being who stood near enough to him in sympathy, yet high enough in principle, to bring order out of this chaos. It was because she was so deeply convinced of duty in the matter, and so well aware of the sacrifice she was making, that she could not believe that the world would award her condemnation.

And the great philosopher, how did he view the subject? Did he ever wake up and feel a pang of regret? Oh, yes, undoubtedly—as soon as it was too late. Probably

Probably there is no record of it—even between the lines—in any of his scientific works—but who will say that there was no night when he walked the floor and clenched his hands and ground his teeth and cursed his own folly, for letting such a magnificent woman slip away from his grasp and go down to such a wretched fate? If there was one touch of malice in George Eliot's nature, it must have triumphed in the arrow which she shot back into the heart of her "deliciously calm" lover, as she sailed away from England, that summer of '54. Yet he always remained her friend. But he could not do otherwise. Utterly odius as the match must have been to him, he could not but have recognized that it was quite of his own making. He brought the two together—and he *left* them together. He was not in a position to offer blame.

And

And George Eliot clung to his friendship always. Probably not because she wished to, but because she could not help it. Anything was better than giving him up altogether. She could never free herself from her conciousness of him. In her last letter to Miss Hennell, before starting for the Continent, on that memorable journey, she wrote, in regard to him: "He will stand in the Biographical Dictionaries of 1954 as—'Spencer, Herbert, an original and profound philosophical writer, especially known by his great work — — which gave a new impulse to psychology, and has mainly contributed to the present advanced position of that science, compared with that which it had attained in the middle of the last century. The life of this philosopher, like that of the great Kant, offers little material for the narrator, etc, etc.'" Why did she happen to

to think of him just then—when she had so many other things in her mind? Because he was still the undercurrent of all her thoughts. There is the ring of deep-rooted bitterness in these few words. Five years later, when she was at the height of her fame, she wrote: "I had quite an *enthusiastic* letter from Herbert Spencer, the other day, about 'Adam Bede.' He says he feels the better for reading it—really words to be treasured up." If her fame did bring her any real satisfaction, apparently it was in that it forced him to recognize her greatness.

The history of these years of deep emotion is given very clearly in "Middlemarch." Not that the book contains direct portraiture. Mr. Casaubon certainly is not Herbert Spencer, nor is the youthful Dorothea a representation of Miss Evans, at thirty-five, nor is the irrepressible

irrepressible, irresponsible Will Ladislaw, Mr. Lewes, in the midst of his domestic troubles—but through these three characters, the heart and soul experiences of three living beings are vividly portrayed. Dorothea's enthusiastic and worshipful admiration for Mr. Casaubon's character and learning, is very similar to what George Eliot felt for Herbert Spencer. And so is the terrible awakening, when she discovers that, though he does consider her a very superior young woman, she is really of small consequence to him, compared with his musty old books. And by the fact of Dorothea being married, and afterwards subject to Mr. Casaubon's peculiar will, her relations with Ladislaw throughout are under a restraint, similar to that which existed between George Eliot and Mr. Lewes.

In precisely what mood, or mental phases, Middlemarch"

march" was written, is not especially dwelt upon. But the few allusions to it would confirm, rather than contradict the impression.

Dec. 2nd, '70, she writes: "Am experimenting in a story (called Miss Brook) which I began without any very serious intention of carrying it out lengthily. It is a subject which has been recorded among my possible themes ever since I began to write fiction, but will probably take new shapes in the development."

In Nov., '72, when sending a copy of "Middlemarch" to Miss Hennell, she writes: "Do not write to me about it because until a book has quite gone away from me and become entirely of the *non-ego*—gone through the wine-press into the casks—I would rather not hear or see anything that is said about it."

This is put in a rather general way, but it just happens

pens, that Miss Hennell was the one person who knew most about George Eliot's affairs at the time in question and would certainly have recognized the heart history.

"Middlemarch," like all of George Eliot's great works, was dedicated to her "dear husband, George Henry Lewes." She recognized fully, that but for him, there would have been no George Eliot—that it was his tender care and devotion which gave her the strength to go on and live out her life. At the close of "Middlemarch," it says of Dorothea: "She never repented that she had given up position and fortune to marry Will Ladislaw, and he would have held it the greatest shame as well as sorrow to him if she had repented." This is equally true of George Eliot and George H. Lewes. And whatever estimate we may

may make of Lewes, as a writer, or as a man, who can help loving him for having loved so faithfully the woman we all—whether we will it or no—are forced to honor?

And now, do we know that woman better? Have we had any "light on the side of the affections"? Is what has been written here, "Wahrheit" or "Dichtung"?

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